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MORGAN'S JOURNEY DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI IN 1767

By Col. JAMES M. MORGAN

George Morgan was the first citizen of the United States who ever made the voyage down the Mississippi from the mouth of the Kaskaskia or Ohio River to the Gulf of Mexico. Butler in his History of Kentucky (1834) says:

> The earliest enterprise in navigating the Mississippi by Americans from Pittsburg to New Orleans was indeed one of boldness. It was performed by Colonel Taylor, of Kentucky, his brother, and Colonel Linn, who got as far as the Yazoo and then went to Georgia with the southern Indians in 1769.

The following fragment of a journal kept by Col. George Morgan while on his first voyage down the Mississippi proves conclusively that he performed the feat at least two years before Colonel Taylor and his party failed to accomplish it.

JOURNAL

On Monday, 30th of September, 1767, I set out from Philadelphia and overtook Mr. John Campbell and Joseph Hollingshed about 33 miles from the city.

I met with Place on his way to Philadelphia with news that two of our boats had been plundered on their way down the Ohio by a party of Indians, who had murdered all of our people. This induced me to go to Mr. Collender's to inquire more particularly into the affair, and wait at Carlisle for the rest of the party to come up.

On Sunday I left Carlisle, stopped at Bedford, and came right on to Fort Pitt (Pittsburg), where I was most politely and kindly welcomed by Captain Edmonstone, royal army, the commanding officer of the garrison.

At the Shawnee cabins I met with a Six Nation Indian who called himself John. Thirty-six days before he had cut his knee with a tomahawk, which glanced from a joint of venison he was cutting. He had been unable to walk ever since and had no one to procure subsistence for him but his wife. I gave one Thomas Hay, who lived near his hut, 25 shillings to buy necessaries for him and ordered as much more to be given him on my part if Mr. Croghan should not come up before that was expended. I ordered him to purchase 100 pounds of flour for him November 21. On Friday at about 11 o'clock I embarked at the Kaskaskia village, situate on the southwest side of a river of the same name, which empties into the Mississippi about —— miles from the town, in which there are about 70 houses, mostly built of wood and plastered on the outside, notwithstanding three fine stone quarries half a mile above the town.

Kaskaskia is situated on rising ground which has never been known to overflow, while all the lowlands along Kaskaskia and Mississippi rivers is yearly subjected to inundation in the months of May and June. In those months fever and ague have been remarkably prevalent insomuch that of the garrison and inhabitants of Fort Chartres few have escaped being more or less afflicted therefrom; and although not in itself mortal, yet the frequency of it must be the occasion of other disorders that are so; insomuch that there is not a single person, male or female, born on the Illinois, of French parents, who has lived to be 50 years of age. But the climate very well agrees with Canadians and Europeans.

The first night we passed Cape "Cinque Nommes," and about 2 leagues below we stopped to cook rations for the 22d, having come 24 miles from the Kaskaskia River.

On the 22d, at 1 o'clock in the morning, I awoke my people to embark, when at that moment a boat from Mr. Clarkson appeared. He had sent it after me, with letters from Philadelphia. Having answered the letters, I passed on, but the wind was blowing strong against us and it became very foggy in the evening. We came no farther than 45 miles, in the course whereof we passed the Kaskaskia tribe of Indians, who were encamped on the English shore to hunt for the winter season. They have a trader with them, whom I supplied for that purpose at their own request.

Sunday, November 23.—The past night and this morning there has been so great a fog that we dare not proceed until 9 o'clock, when we embarked and reached the Ohio before 11; up which beautiful river we proceeded 2 miles to the Clarkson's bateaux, where I rested until the next morning, a very heavy thunderstorm having come up in the afternoon.

From this point I wrote necessary letters to Messrs. Cole, Jennings, Clarkson, and Maisonville.

Monday, November 24.—The great fog this morning prevented our pushing off until 7 o'clock, when it cleared a little, but soon come on again when we got into the Mississippi. It was so heavy that we could not see the boat's length, which obliged me to put in to the shore again, where we remained until 10 o'clock, when we once more made a start, but, the wind being southeast, we made no more from the Ohio; in the course of which we passed three different hunting parties who had ascended the Mississippi from New Orleans for the purpose of killing buffalo, bears, which they salt up in large pirogues and bateaux and descend therewith by the beginning of December, to supply the inhabitants of Orleans. I visited one of their encampments and was kindly treated with bear's meat and buffalo excellently dressed in oil.

Tuesday, November 25.—The fog again prevented my starting long before daylight, and, the wind being stormy and ahead, we got no farther than the "little field," on the Spanish shore. During the day we passed other French hunting parties.

Wednesday, November 26.—Fog continues. We were not enabled to make much headway. Passed other hunting parties. Went on shore for meat, but could get none.

Thursday, November 27.—About 8 o'clock the storm abated and I pushed off, but at 11 it came on with such violence that I was obliged to put in to the shore, as I could make no headway against it. This detained me until after 12 o'clock, but in the interval one of my people killed a buffalo, which removed the fear that we might fall short of provisions.

Friday, November 28.—Embarked this morning at 6 o'clock, but the wind

coming out from the south, I could make no farther than the Heights of Margo, on the English shore.

Saturday, November 29.—Fog and wind continuing unfavorable, we came no farther than Consuls Bar, 36 miles from the Heights of Margo.

Sunday, November 30.—At half past 3 o'clock in the afternoon we passed the river St. Francis, about 30 miles from last night's encampment. The banks are low and, like the others, subject to overflow.

Monday, December 1.—Passed the Hermitage, 30 miles below the mouth of the St. Francis River; encamped opposite Iron Island, on the French shore; land low; soil rich.

Tuesday, December 2.—Made only 21 miles; passed several deserted Indian villages; encamped on a high bank on the English shore.

Wednesday, December 3.—At 1 o'clock passed the Arkansas River, opposite which is an island 15 miles long, on which is a small French fort and about 10 families. In the evening we encamped 15 miles below.

Thursday, December 4.—Made but little headway on account of the dense fog. Met two large pirogues on their way to the Arkansas from New Orleans. They had been out eight weeks.

Friday, December 5.—From the rain we had last night and the change of the moon I flattered myself that the wind would turn to the north, but the fog continued and was so dense the whole day as almost to deter me from proceeding on account of the danger of running foul of the many logs which stand upon end in the river. Passed Great and Little ——— and camped on the French shore.

Saturday, December 6.—Camped on the English shore.

Sunday, December 7.—Passed two French hunting parties, both on the English shore.

Monday, December 8.—This morning we embarked at 7 o'clock. Passed the river ———. There we overtook a pirogue going to New Orleans with buffalo meat. At night we camped on the French shore, 45 miles below. This is the first day the sun has shone since we left the Illinois. We could have made 6 or 8 miles more this day had we not seen a bear in the river which I was tempted to give chase to and finally shot. It proved to be a female, exceeding fat and fine eating. She measured 41½ inches around the middle and 5 feet from head to tail.

December 9.—Passed Grand Gulf. This is a remarkably short turn in the river and occasions a particularly rapid current in it, and gave rise to the name.

December 10.—Fog and rain continued.

December 11.—I embarked at 7 o'clock this morning and about 4 in the afternoon arrived at the fort commonly called "Natchez," from a tribe of Indians who inhabit the country. The fort was destroyed by the French in 1730. It is situated on a high hill, distant from the river 590 yards. There is at present a garrison of 44 men with 4 officers, a detachment of Scots Fusiliers, commanded by Captain Rhea, who took possession on the 29th of last September. This fort was built by the French in 1759 and deserted by them immediately after the treaty of peace, when it was, with all the country east of the Mississippi, ceded to the English.

December 12.—I tarried at Natchez to dry my potterie and take the latitude of the fort, which I find to be 31° 30′ north. Back of the fort are very extensive meadows, but the want of a horse and guide prevented my reconnoitering the same and visiting the spot where the French and Indians had their villages.

Sunday, December 13.—We arrived about 7 o'clock in the evening at Rouge, where we went on shore for the purpose of cooking to-morrow's About 50 leagues up this river is what they call the "rapids," and an Indian of the Avoyelles tribe, and about 50 leagues still higher up is the Natic

another tribe, and a considerable French settlement. The Spaniards now have New Orleans and all of the west side of the Mississippi, which was given up to them by the French. This river will be the passageway for a considerable portion of the Spanish treasure from Mexico.

December 14.—Wind and rain prevented my making much headway this day. I met 4 Indian canoes containing several Indians each, and on the banks were encamped several hunting parties. In the course of the day's sailing, I passed 7 small French huts and about 40 or 50 negroes from Point Coupee engaged in cutting and hewing cypress so as to have it ready to float down to New Orleans early in the spring.

December 15.—I embarked this morning at about 5 o'clock and stopped at the first French settlement of Point Coupee, where I breakfasted and tarried until near 7 o'clock in order that I might have daylight to view the settlement as I passed. It begins 48½ leagues below Natchez and extends 21 miles down the river. It is protected by a small fort garrisoned by one officer and 26 me Several of the inhabitants have 40 negroes, some 50, and few who have liv the country any time have less than 5 or 6. The banks are high, the are good, and in a few years the occupants will become rich. I had a p gale in passing the place and took great satisfaction in seeing my Engli fairly exposed to the view of the old masters of this great river, who came forth from every house to gaze at them. When we were passing the sentry hailed and ordered me to come on shore, but seeing my colors it better not to insist on my paying them that respect. My bateaux me were principally Frenchmen were in great trepidation at my resolution to without visiting the commanding officer lest we would be fired upon. At about 7 in the evening I arrived at Fort Bute, situated near the Iberville ditch. I tarried here the 16th, 17th, and 18th to see the Iberville River so much talked of as a passage of importance to the English nation, and the boundary between the French and English colonies.

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